

Message Text

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TAGS: EC, EFIS

SUBJECT: CAT'S OUT OF THE BAG

1. WASHINGTON STAR TODAY PUBLISHED FOLLOWING STORY UNDER THIS FOUR-COLUMN HEAD: QUOTE MILITARY AID TO ECUADOR FROZEN UNQUOTE (BY-LINE JERRY O'LEARY): QUOTE THE UNITED STATES HAS SUSPENDED ALL NEW COMMITMENTS FOR MILITARY AID TO ECUADOR SINCE JAN. 25, WHEN THE SOUTH AMERICAN COUNTRY BEGAN SEIZING AMERICAN TUNA BOATS IN DISPUTED WATERS MORE THAN 60 MILES OFF ITS COAST.

U.S. OFFICIALS SAID YESTERDAY THAT NO NEW COMMITMENTS ARE BEING MADE BECAUSE LAWS ON FOREIGN ASSISTANCE AND PROTECTION OF FISHERMEN REQUIRE AUTOMATIC SUSPENSION OF MILITARY ASSISTANCE UNLESS THE PRESIDENT GRANTS A WAIVER IN THE INTEREST OF NATIONAL SECURITY. SUSPENSION OF MILITARY AID IS MANDATORY IN CASES OF SEIZURE OF U.S. FISHING VESSELS BY FOREIGN POWERS IN INTERNATIONAL WATERS.

ANY COMMITMENTS FOR MILITARY PROCUREMENT OR TRAINING ASSISTANCE MADE PRIOR TO THE NEW RASH OF TUNA BOAT SEIZURES BY THE ECUADOREAN NAVY ARE NOT AFFECTED BY AUTOMATIC INVOCATION OF THE POST-JAN. 25 SUSPENSION.

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U.S. OFFICIALS SAID THE ENTIRE MILITARY AID PROGRAM FOR ECUADOR, PRIMARILY A DOLS 400,000 AUTHORIZATION FOR TRAINING PERSONNEL AND SOME MINOR EQUIPMENT FOR AMERICAN-MADE WARSHIPS AND WEAPONS IS UNDER REVIEW.

THE DISCLOSURE COMES AT A TIME WHEN ECUADOR'S GOVERNMENT ALREADY IS INCENSED BECAUSE THE NEW U.S. TRADE BILL EXCLUDES BOTH ECUADOR AND VENEZUELA FROM PREFERENTIAL TRADE STATUS. THE QUITO REGIME IS OUTRAGED BECAUSE THE DENIAL OF TARIFF PREFERENCES, ALTHOUGH OPPOSED BY THE FORD ADMINISTRATION, WAS IMPOSED BY CONGRESS ON ALL MEMBERS OF THE ORGANIZATION OF PETROLEUM EXPORTING COUNTRIES. THE TWO OIL-RICH SOUTH AMERICAN NATIONS DID NOT TAKE PART IN THE ARAB OIL EMBARGO AGAINST THE UNITED STATES AFTER THE 1973 MIDEAST WAR.

A SIMILAR SUSPENSION OF MILITARY ASSISTANCE THREE YEARS AGO RESULTED IN EXPULSION BY ECUADOR OF THE U.S. MILITARY ASSISTANCE ADVISORY GROUP. A SMALL U.S. MILITARY MISSION REMAINS IN ECUADOR.

THE NEW INCIDENTS SO FAR HAVE RESULTED IN SEIZURE OF SEVEN AMERICAN-FLAG BOATS AND IMPOSITION OF FINES TOTALLING DOLS 3.5 MILLION BY ECUADOR. SOME OF THE BOAT OWNERS HAVE NOT PAID THEIR FINES YET FOR FISHING WITHOUT ECUADOREAN LICENSES AND THEIR VESSELS ARE STILL BEING HELD AT THE PACIFIC PORT OF SALINAS.

THE STATE DEPARTMENT IS UNDER HEAVY PRESSURE FROM MEMBERS OF CONGRESS ABOUT THE NEW SEIZURES. ADDING TO THE SITUATION IS THE FACT THAT THE ECUADOREANS ARE CAPTURING THE BOATS BY USING SMALL WARSHIPS THEY ACQUIRED EITHER BY PURCHASE OR LOAN FROM THE UNITED STATES.

THE STATE DEPARTMENT CLEARLY IS TRYING TO AVOID A CONFRONTATION WITH ECUADOR WITHOUT DISOBEYING U.S. LAW. BUT IN THE PRESENT EDGY CIRCUMSTANCES, ABOUT ALL WASHINGTON CAN DO IS HOPE THE TUNA WILL SOON LEAVE THE WATERS INSIDE THE 200-MILE LIMIT CLAIMED BY ECUADOR BUT CONSIDERED INTERNATIONAL WATERS BY THE UNITED STATES

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AND MOST MAJOR MARITIME NATIONS. THIS COUNTRY RECOGNIZES TERRITORIAL SOVEREIGNTY ONLY WITHIN THREE MILES OF A COAST, PLUS A NINE-MILE SPECIAL INTEREST ZONE.

THE ISSUE IS MORE EMOTIONAL AND NATIONALISTIC FOR ECUADOR THAN MILITARILY OR ECONOMICALLY SIGNIFICANT. THE QUADRUPLED PRICE OF OIL HAS PROPELLED ECUADOR FAR BEYOND NORMAL AID NEEDS OF A DEVELOPING NATION, ALTHOUGH

TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE IS STILL NEEDED. WITH ITS

MULTI-MILLION DOLLAR OIL REVENUES, ECUADOR OBVIOUSLY
CAN ACQUIRE MILITARY EQUIPMENT AND TRAINING ASSISTANCE
ELSEWHERE.

WASHINGTON IS UNHAPPY THAT ECUADOR AND VENEZUELA
HAVE FORCED CANCELLATION OF A WESTERN HEMISPHERE FOREIGN
MINISTERS' MEETING, WHICH HAD BEEN SCHEDULED FOR NEXT
MONTH IN BUENOS AIRES, AS A RESULT OF THE TRADE BILL
RESTRICTIONS.

THE STATE DEPARTMENT IS SOFT-PEDALLING THE "TUNA
WAR" IN AN EFFORT TO KEEP THE SO-CALLED QUOTE
NEW DIALOGUE UNQUOTE WITH LATIN AMERICA ALIVE. BUT
CONGRESS IS UP IN ARMS BECAUSE THE AMERICAN TAXPAYER
ENDS UP PAYING THE FINES AND LOSSES INCURRED IN THE
SEIZURE OF THE TUNA BOATS. UNDER THE LAW, THE
FISHERMEN MUST BE REIMBURSED BY THE U.S. TREASURY FOR
THE FINES OR CONFISCATION OF THEIR BOATS. UNQUOTE. INGERSOLL

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